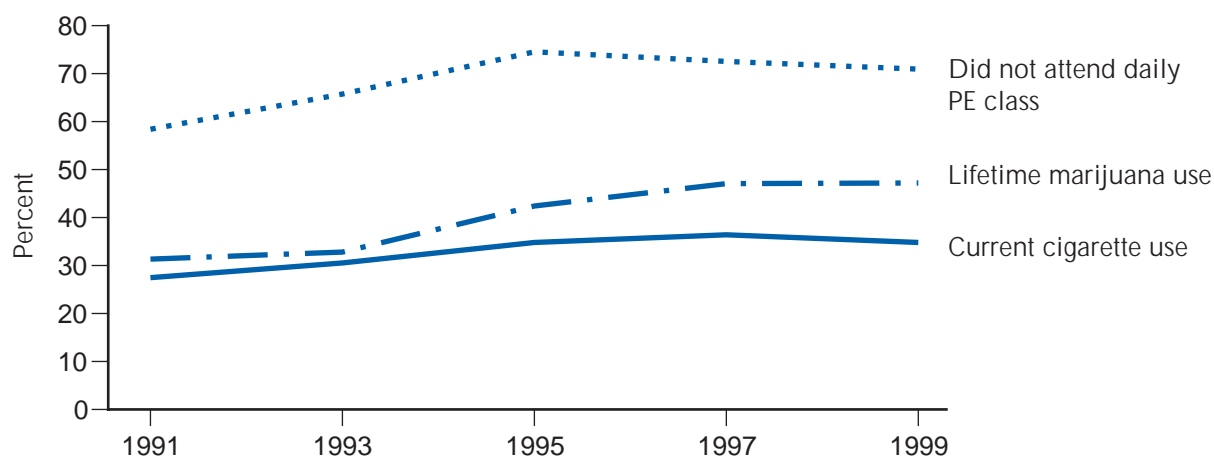




Assessing Health Risk Behaviors Among Young People: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System 2002

Health Risk Behaviors Among U.S. High School Students, 1991–1999



Source: CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System.

“Over the years, the YRBSS has proven to be a valuable tool for providing vital information about the behaviors affecting the healthy development and academic attainment of our nation’s youth.”

Brenda L. Welburn

Executive Director, National Association of State Boards of Education

Assessing Health Risk Behaviors Among Young People

Risk Behaviors Are Linked to the Leading Causes of Death

Today, the health of young people—and the adults they will become—is critically linked to the health-related behaviors they choose to adopt. A limited number of behaviors contribute markedly to today's major killers. These behaviors, often established during youth, include

- Tobacco use.
- Unhealthy dietary behaviors.
- Inadequate physical activity.
- Alcohol and other drug use.
- Sexual behaviors that may result in HIV infection, other sexually transmitted diseases, and unintended pregnancies.
- Behaviors that may result in violence and unintentional injuries (motor vehicle crashes).

Among both children and adults, the leading causes of death are closely linked to these behaviors. Among adults, chronic diseases—such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes—are the nation's leading killers. Practicing healthy behaviors, such as eating low-fat, high-fruit-and-vegetable diets, getting regular physical activity, and refraining from tobacco use, would prevent many premature deaths. Because health-related behaviors are usually established in childhood, positive choices need to be promoted before damaging behaviors are initiated or become ingrained.

Purposes of the YRBSS

- Determine the prevalence and age of initiation of health risk behaviors.
- Assess whether health risk behaviors increase, decrease, or remain the same over time.
- Examine the co-occurrence of health risk behaviors among young people.
- Provide comparable national, state, and local data.
- Monitor progress toward achieving the *Healthy People 2010* objectives, leading health indicators, and the National Education Goals.

Collecting Vital Information

Before the 1990s, little was known about the prevalence of behaviors practiced by young people that put their health at risk. The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) now provides such information. Developed by CDC in collaboration with federal, state, and private-sector partners, this voluntary system includes a national survey and surveys conducted by state and local education and health agencies. The YRBSS provides vital information on risk behaviors among young people to more effectively target and improve health programs.

Using YRBSS Data

State and local health and education officials use YRBSS data in a variety of ways:

- Implement or modify programs to address the behaviors of young people in a specific area.

In New York City, YRBSS data on unintentional injuries led to the development of a program called "Safety Makes Sense."

- Set program goals and objectives and monitor the progress toward those goals.

In Wyoming, YRBSS data helped in assessing the implementation of health education standards.

- Create awareness of the extent of risk behaviors among young people.

In Wisconsin, YRBSS data were published in the state's medical journal to help educate new physicians about adolescent health issues.

- Promote state-level changes that support specific health education curricula and coordinated school health programs.

State legislators in Tennessee used YRBSS data to support the Coordinated School Health Improvement Act.

- Seek funding from federal, state, and private sources by demonstrating need.

In Washington, D.C., YRBSS data were used to help obtain funding for a school-based adolescent health clinic.

CDC's Leadership Role

To ensure the availability of accurate and current information on health risk behaviors among young people, CDC provides funding and technical support to states and major cities to conduct a Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). In addition, CDC supports coordinated school health programs in 20 states to provide young people with the information and skills they need to avoid health-damaging behaviors.

Assisting With State and Local Surveys

With technical assistance from CDC, staff of state and local departments of education and health conduct a YRBS every 2 years. Staff can add or delete questions in the core questionnaire to better meet the interests and needs of the state or local school district. School-based surveys were last conducted in 1999 among students in grades 9–12 in 42 states, 16 large cities, and 4 territories. The average sample size was 2,200.

CDC's technical assistance includes

- A 3-day training course for state and local coordinators.
- Specialized software to guide states in selecting schools and classes.
- Assistance in analyzing data and preparing state-specific reports.
- Assistance in applying survey results to improve school health programs and policies.

Conducting National Surveys

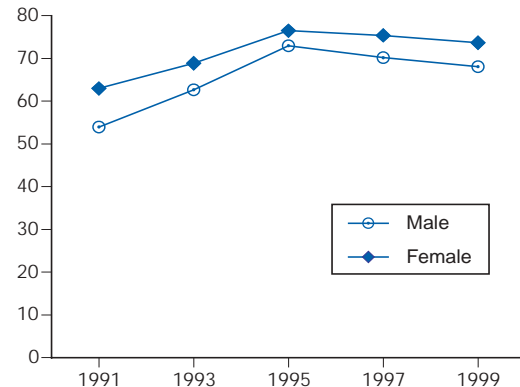
In addition to assisting states, CDC conducts a national survey every 2 years to produce data representative of students in grades 9–12 in public and private schools in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The 1999 survey had more than 15,000 respondents.

To provide critical information on health risk behaviors among young people in high-risk situations and those in colleges, CDC conducted additional national surveys:

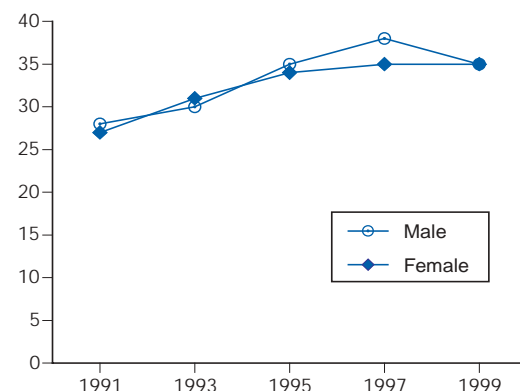
- The National Alternative High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey, conducted in 1998 among a representative sample of almost 9,000 students in alternative schools.
- The National College Health Risk Behavior Survey, conducted in 1995 among a representative sample of about 5,000 undergraduate students. CDC is planning to conduct another survey in 2003.

Results From National Surveys, 1991–1999

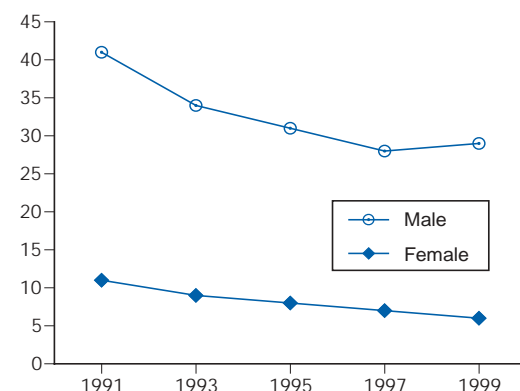
Percentage of High School Students Who Did Not Attend Physical Education Classes Daily, by Sex



Percentage of High School Students Who Smoked a Cigarette in the Past Month, by Sex

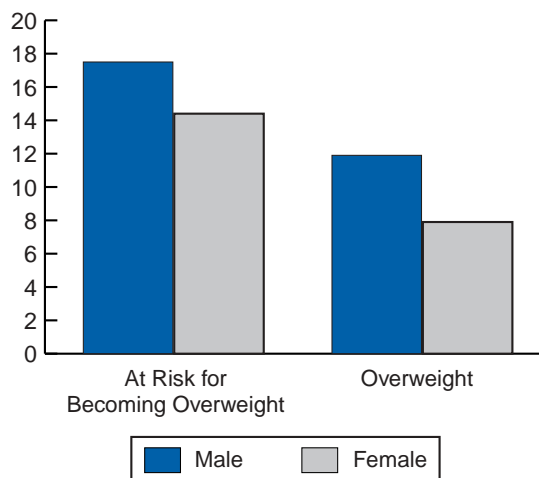


Percentage of High School Students Who Carried a Weapon in the Past Month, by Sex



Source: CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 1991–1999.

Percentage of High School Students Who Were at Risk for Becoming* or Were Overweight,† by Sex



*Students who were 85th percentile but <95th percentile for body mass index, by age and sex.

†Students who were 95th percentile for body mass index, by age and sex.

Source: CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 1999.

Comments From Users of YRBSS Data

"Folks in Montana—community people, parents—assumed that just because their kids grew up in a beautiful, large, sparsely populated state that they were immune to health risk behaviors. . . What the YRBS has shown is that rural young people, in many cases, have problems identical to those of young people in urban areas, and in some cases the problems are worse in rural areas."

—Spencer Sartorius, MS
Division Administrator

Health Enhancement and Safety Bureau

"We [San Diego Unified School District] received a grant to address tobacco use for high school students. With the YRBS, we found that many young women start [smoking] later than young men, but by the time they are seniors, they actually use tobacco more. We targeted young women in our application for this grant on the basis of the data."

—Jack Campana, MA
Director, Comprehensive Health and Wellness
San Diego Unified School District

"The data from these surveys have provided us with an important overview of the health of adolescents. In turn, this information has helped to inform programs and policies that focus on adolescent health promotion and disease prevention as well as health care services delivery."

—Della M. Hughes
Executive Director
National Network for Youth

Participants in the YRBSS, 1999

These locations conducted their own surveys.

States

Alabama
Alaska
Arkansas
California
Colorado
Connecticut
Delaware
District of Columbia
Florida
Georgia
Hawaii
Idaho
Illinois
Iowa
Kentucky
Louisiana
Maine
Massachusetts
Michigan
Mississippi
Missouri
Montana
Nebraska
Nevada
New Hampshire
New Jersey
New Mexico
New York
North Dakota
Ohio
Oregon
Rhode Island
South Carolina

South Dakota
Tennessee
Texas
Utah
Vermont
Washington
West Virginia
Wisconsin
Wyoming

Territories

American Samoa
Guam
Marshall Islands
Palau

Cities

Baltimore
Boston
Chicago
Dallas
Detroit
Fort Lauderdale
Houston
Miami
New Orleans
New York
Palm Beach
Philadelphia
San Bernadino
San Diego
San Francisco
Seattle

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